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Panel to focus on Lake St. Clair, Clinton River environment, economy

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Macomb County Executive Mark Hackel today announced the formation of a new 22-member private/public sector panel to support clean water, tourism, recreation and economic development along Lake St. Clair and the Clinton River with members coming from groups across metro Detroit.

The panel — the Macomb County Water Resources Advisory Council — will concentrate on the three cornerstones of Hackel's New Blue Economy initiative. They include water quality, water access and water attraction.

The council also will focus on attracting smart water technology companies; one of the county's targeted industry sectors.

The council includes government representatives, including Hackel (plus a designee) and Commission Chairwoman Kathy Vosburg or her designee, and members of higher education, environmental agencies, economic development and private industry.

It also includes Jim Wineka, representing Oakland County Water Resources Commission; Steve Olinek for the Detroit/Wayne County Port Authority; Chuck Hersey for the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments, and Jennifer Tewkesbury for the Michigan Department of Natural Resources.

The group is the first advisory group created under the new form of county government and will work toward keeping waterways free of debris and pollution and beaches open.

"Making Lake St. Clair and the Clinton River more accessible to people so that they become destination points for tourism and commerce will also be part of our comprehensive focus," Hackel said in a news release.

Among the New Blue Economy's short-term initiatives is opening up the Clinton River for canoeing and kayaking between Utica and Rochester and to erect promotional and locational signage for Lake St. Clair along key roadways in the county.

Last week, Hackel turned in his charter-mandated organization plan, which detailed \$2.5 million in cuts annually, including about \$100,000 in savings from the elimination of seven of the county's 38 boards, including the Water Quality Board.

However, Hackel said he was considering advisory councils for some of the eliminated boards, such as water quality, which is a big issue for him and the commissioners.

In March, he announced that Gerard Santoro, the county's senior planner of environment, would be the program manager for land and water resources to oversee his New Blue Economy initiative unveiled in February. Santoro is on the new council.

Hackel's plans have called for more access to waterways, developing greenways along the north branch of the Clinton River and using floodplains as nature and mountain biking trails to connect the southern and northern parts of the county. It also includes paddling trails along the river and coastal lake.

In February, Hackel said there are opportunities to acquire land around the Clinton River, possibly through easements, and that he wanted to open it from Yates Cider Mill in Rochester Hills to Lake St. Clair. He said he would like to see beaches, campsites and liveries along the waterway.

Other members on the council from the county are: Lynne Seymour, an environmental engineer with public works; Gary White, health officer with the health department; Luanne Lammerman, environmental prosecutor with the county prosecutor, and Sheriff's Marine Division Lt. Brian Barlog.

The other members and the agency, office or discipline they represent are: Anne Vaara, Clinton River Watershed Council; Paul Muelle, Huron-Clinton Metroparks-environmentalist; Dr. Scott Tieg of Oakland University, research/university; Randall Young of Macomb Community College, community college; former state senator Ken DeBeaussiaert, state/regional policy; Mike Pratt of Grade A Farms, agricultural and soil conservation district; Roy Rose of Anderson, Eckstein and Westrick, private civil engineering firm; Steve Remias, Michigan Boating Industry Association, private marina industry, and Brad Simmons, Lake St. Clair Tourism Initiative designee.

There also will be two members at large. One is Tom Morley of the county Water Quality Board. The other member is to be determined.

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